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# Politics in the *Life of Daniel the Stylite*: The Holy Man as a Political Player in Late Antique Constantinople

**Abstract:** As Christianity became the dominant religion of the late antique Roman Empire, leaders of Christian communities started to play a role in imperial politics. In the 4th century, bishops could exercise direct and decisive influence on the emperor; holy men succeeded them in this role during the 5th century. Daniel the Stylite is the prime example of a holy man engaged in imperial politics, acting as the personal adviser of Emperor Leo I. Taking up his abode on top of a pillar near Constantinople, Daniel's spiritual authority gradually increased through the working of miracles and successful intercessory prayers. Hence, members of the imperial elite and finally the emperor himself consulted him on personal affairs, but also on political matters pertaining to the entire empire. These contacts were in the interest of both the persons of secular authority and the holy man: it increased the political legitimacy of the former and fostered the authority of the latter.

**Keywords:** Daniel the Stylite, holy man, Eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople

## Introduction

The late antique holy man, and the subtype of the 'pillar saint' in particular, can be a bizarre phenomenon to an (uninitiated) modern observer. Many will find it difficult to relate to their ascetic practices, which involved extreme abstinence and self-mortification. Arguably the champions of asceticism were the pillar saints, also named 'stylites' after the Greek word for pillar, *stylos*. Exposed to the seasons on an open, small platform on top of a high pillar, a stylite ostentatiously devoted his body and life to the adoration of God. Such practices might yet seem somehow understandable as extreme forms of religious devotion, an area of human activity that often tends to express itself in uncommon, irrational ways. We might, then, comprehend that men and women who led such lives were held in high esteem by their contemporaries, who indeed worshipped them during their lifetime. Yet there is another, more complex issue of late antique holiness that puzzles the modern historian: the involvement of a holy man in secular politics, up to the highest, i.e. imperial level. A holy man did not only have a great status as a spiritual man, but he could also exercise significant influence in secular matters. This blurring of spiritual and secular power, by no means exceptional in pre-modern states, is strange to modern politics, in which the enlightenment ideal of a strict

separation between religious and political spheres is pivotal.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, this volume on the ‘Power of the Priests’, which presents many more parallel cases, seems a suitable place to study the political role of the late antique holy man.

Daniel the Stylite will be the holy man around whom our observations revolve. He allegedly lived for 33 years and 3 days on top of one, later on two or even three columns at a short distance from the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire, Constantinople. This paper examines the dynamics of political power, influence, and legitimacy around the figure of Daniel as a prime example of the phenomenon of the politically engaged holy man at the imperial court in 5th-century Constantinople. We first consider how Daniel, and the late antique holy man in general, can be considered a ‘priest with power’ in accordance with the general theme of this volume. Although Daniel’s political involvement as a holy man is exceptional, even for late antique standards, his is not an isolated case. Therefore, the second part of this paper shows against what background Daniel’s political role as a man of spiritual, Christian authority should be seen. It examines trends and developments over the 4th and 5th centuries concerning the relationship between emperors and people who claimed political influence on the basis of their spiritual authority. Finally, we offer a close study of the political processes described in the *Life of Daniel the Stylite* (henceforth *LD*), the main source for Daniel’s political activities. We propose a critical model that allows us to identify and examine relationships of political power in which the late antique holy man is engaged. The holy man’s involvement in political relationships could have mutual benefits, both to the secular people involved and to the holy man himself, whose spiritual authority could benefit from social recognition and an increased reputation. Before we discuss these matters in detail, it will be useful to start with a brief summary of Daniel’s biography, based on the *LD*.

The *LD*, a Greek hagiographical text, was probably produced in the years after Daniel’s death in 493. Its author is unknown, but he might have been a disciple of Daniel who lived in the monastic community at the column’s base: the narrator of the text presents himself as eyewitness to many of the events in Daniel’s life.<sup>2</sup> After a brief introduction, its narrative begins with Daniel’s birth in the Syrian village of Meratha, which is to be dated around 410 AD.<sup>3</sup> At the age of twelve, Daniel against the will of his parents joined a nearby monastic community, where he became an accom-

1 Only the figure of Rasputin is regularly adduced as a ‘priest’ with political power that was comparable to that of the most influential holy men in Late Antiquity. Hippolyte Delehaye, for example, closes his evaluation of the *Life of Daniel the Stylite* with the following allusive remark: “Nous aurions plus de peine à comprendre l’ascendant pris par un solitaire sur les chefs de l’État, sans les exemples récents qui sont dans la mémoire de tous.” Delehaye 1923, LV.

2 The standard edition of the text is Delehaye 1923, 1–94; translations exist in English: Dawes/Baynes 1948, 7–84, in French: Festugière 1961, 93–165, and in Dutch: van der Horst 2009. On authorship, date and transmission of the text, see Delehaye 1923, XXXVI–XXXIX; Efthymiadis 2011, 61; Kosiński 2016, 119; Lane Fox 1997, 185–200.

3 All dates in this contribution are AD, unless indicated otherwise.

plished ascetic monk over the following three decades. In the early 450s, he left his native Syria to take up residence in the surroundings of Constantinople. He first spent some years in a deserted pagan temple that was thought to be haunted by demons. Around 460, he decided to continue his ascetic lifestyle on top of a pillar. After overcoming some initial quarrels with the owner of the land where he set up his first column, his star began to rise. In reverence of Daniel's holiness, to which his successful intercessory prayers and fulfilled prophecies testified, ever more important aristocrats began visiting the stylite and offered him gifts: he received two additional columns in addition to the first one. Before long, the (Eastern) emperor himself, Leo I, also found his way to the holy man. Daniel became little less than Leo's personal holy adviser as the emperor sought his counsel on a great variety of political issues. He also ordered Gennadios, the archbishop of Constantinople, to ordain Daniel a priest. In the *LD*'s portrayal, the climactic moment in Daniel's life came after Leo's death, when the holy man confronted the usurping Emperor Basiliscus over his support for a Christian doctrine that the stylite considered heretical. Basiliscus yielded to Daniel; the former would not last long as an emperor, while the latter would continue to command respect during the reign of Zeno into that of Anastasius. At Daniel's death (still on top of the pillar), a solemn cortège attended his funeral as his body was brought down and buried at the feet of his columns.

## The Holy Man as a Political Priest

We will return to Daniel's life in detail below; first, we need to address questions of definition and offer some contextualisation. We may begin by asking in what way Daniel can be considered a 'priest'. Strictly speaking, Daniel only became a priest when his contacts with the political elite in Constantinople were already well-established: his (rather unconventional) consecration by Gennadios happened after his first contact with the emperor Leo.<sup>4</sup> For Daniel, the priesthood was merely an external confirmation of his holy status;<sup>5</sup> neither his outward activities nor the nature of his authority changed after his ordination. Therefore, we shall consider Daniel and other holy men as priests under a broad definition of 'religious experts', whose special status in society was based on their perceived spiritual authority. This also allows us to compare Da-

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4 *LD* 42–43. Gennadios initially refused to fulfill Leo's demand; he only obeyed in second instance, after the emperor had urgently ordered him to go to the stylite. Daniel, in turn, was reluctant to be ordained and did not allow the archbishop to ascend his pillar. In the end, Gennadios spoke the words of ordination at the base of the column without a laying of hands. Rapp 2005, 141–142 observes that several holy men, including Daniel, were not at all eager to become a priest, which, in fact, emphasises their humility and worthiness to be ordained.

5 The ordination was an important moment for Leo, who was the instigator behind it; we will return to this below.

niel's position to that of similar figures (whether they were priests in a strict sense or not) who played a political role in the Roman Empire on the basis of their spiritual authority.

Let us have a closer look at Daniel's spiritual authority that underpinned his status as a religious expert. The holy man (or woman<sup>6</sup>), of which Daniel is a prime example, is a well-known figure to scholars of Late Antiquity. He can be defined as a person who was worshipped during his lifetime because of a perceived closeness to God, to which an ascetic lifestyle and the performing of miracles typically testify.<sup>7</sup> Holy men appear in our sources, most prominently in hagiographical texts, from the 4th century onwards. What status they actually had in society, and to what extent their alleged prominence may reveal general trends in the Late Antique world, remains a subject of debate.

It was an article by the famous historian Peter Brown, published in 1971, that made the holy man a protagonist in the rise of Late Antique studies.<sup>8</sup> In Brown's eyes, holy men were the landmark figures of Eastern Roman society. He considered their "rise and function", as his article is titled, indicative of trends and changes that affected the world of the Roman east. Significantly, he saw the holy man as a social patron. Due to changes in the empire's administrative organisation and hierarchy, contact with (local) authorities became increasingly difficult for people in the Syrian countryside; holy men filled this vacuum as new patrons in this power structure. They acted as mediators who could appeal to God as well as to people in power, including the emperor himself. Brown further suggested that the accounts of their lives can yield information about the lives, concerns, and beliefs of Roman commoners, whom we meet in the hagiographical texts as the crowds looking for a holy man's guidance.<sup>9</sup>

This article, which scholars generally qualify "seminal" or even "classic", has inspired many studies that follow up on its observations and theses, although they are

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6 For matters of convenience and because all 'holy men' discussed here were, indeed, men, I will refer to the general figure of the holy man as a male person.

7 Some scholars use 'ascetic' or 'monk' (or both) synonymously with 'holy man' (e.g. Hasse-Ungeheuer 2016); I prefer not to do so. Holy men typically lived an ascetic lifestyle, but asceticism was not a sufficient condition to become a holy man. Similarly, most holy men were indeed monks, but not all monks were holy men. Bishops, too, could be worshipped for their holiness, and holy women were often aristocrats who abjured a life of luxury and used their wealth to sponsor Christian communities. In English scholarship, moreover, 'holy men' are often distinguished from 'saints', who were worshipped posthumously on account of their holiness.

8 Brown 1971. For an evaluation of the theories that influenced this study, see his own recapitulation in Brown 1998.

9 Thus, hagiographical accounts could serve "as a mirror, to catch, from a surprising angle, another glimpse of the average Late Roman" (Brown 1971, 81).

not necessarily in agreement with Brown's original ideas.<sup>10</sup> Two themes in studies on Late Antique holiness are of particular interest to us here. The first concerns the authority that a cleric had in Late Antiquity, which supported his influence and his status as a patron – his 'power', if one will. Claudia Rapp's 2005 monograph is indispensable on this subject. Rapp subdivides the authority of the Late Antique bishop into three related categories: pragmatic, spiritual, and ascetic authority. Pragmatic authority depends on the responsibilities of a bishop as a leader of a local community; spiritual authority concerns the ability to act and communicate with the Holy Spirit; ascetic authority is the authority gained from living an ascetic lifestyle, which could simultaneously contribute and testify to one's spiritual authority. Most relevant to our purposes is Rapp's delineation of spiritual authority: holy men who acted in accordance with the Holy Spirit were able to influence secular leaders.<sup>11</sup> This ability was known as *parrhesia* in ancient sources, a term to which will return below. Rapp's observations are mostly concerned with the *effects* of spiritual authority, rather than with its *sources* or *causes*: she takes for granted that a holy man *had* spiritual authority. This paper, however, does not take a holy man's spiritual authority for granted: by approaching it as a social construct, we may observe how dynamics of reputation and recognition were also important in a holy man's ability to exercise political influence.

Thus we come upon the second theme: interactions between holy men and persons of secular authority, particularly the emperor, in the Eastern Roman Empire.<sup>12</sup> When Brown described the holy man as first and foremost a patron to the Roman commoner, whose essential activity was a day-to-day business in answering to the needs of his flock, he responded to earlier studies that rather tended to focus on the most significant moments of holy men's lives.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Brown transferred the holy man away from the fields of political and church history, in which historians had hitherto mostly considered his role.<sup>14</sup> Recently, the political role of the holy man has attracted

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**10** Instructive are the two collections of papers published on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Brown's 1971 paper: Elm/Janowitz 1998 (which includes Brown 1998) and Hayward/Howard-Johnston 1999. Brown 1995, 55–78 and Brown 2000 take a different approach to the holy man than his 1971 article: he considers a more variegated body of sources than just hagiography and broadens his geographical scope to include the west (his 1971 article mostly treats examples from the east). MacMullen 2019, 3–4 n. 6, lists places where Brown 1971 is (in MacMullen's eyes uncritically, perhaps even unduly) praised; the article as a whole is in fundamental disagreement with Brown's treatment of the holy man.

**11** Rapp 2005, 3–152, with 56–99 on spiritual authority.

**12** The society of the Western Roman Empire (and its successor states) never saw holy men rise to the status of prominence they had in the east. Instead, bishops retained more secular power and veneration of individuals on account of their spiritual status largely occurred after their death, i.e. as saints. See Brown 1976, 10–24 on differences between holiness in the late antique east and west.

**13** Brown 1971, 80, with references to earlier studies on the late antique holy man.

**14** (Church) politics was by no means entirely absent from post-Brownian scholarship on the holy man, but studies rarely focused on it (with the notable exception of studies specifically on Daniel the Stylite, whose life is so markedly political). See e.g. Caner 2002 and Hatlie 2007, both of which do not

renewed scholarly attention, particularly in the form of two monographs by Rafał Kosiński and Alexandra Hasse-Ungeheuer.<sup>15</sup> Kosiński's work is useful mostly as a collection and discussion of interactions between holy men and people of authority as transmitted in four relatively reliable hagiographical accounts of holy men in the 5th century. However, it does not draw any comprehensive conclusions on "holiness and power".<sup>16</sup> Hasse-Ungeheuer's work is more argumentative in that respect: she studies legal texts and historiography as well as hagiography to evaluate the role of monasticism and holiness in politics during Justinian's reign. She observes how monasticism was politicised as Emperor Justinian sought to employ monks and their spiritual authority to support his rule. Justinian himself even appropriated certain characteristics of holy men to enhance his own imperial self-representation. Although the source material on political history is much less abundant for the period through which Daniel lived than for Justinian's reign, we will adopt Hasse-Ungeheuer's approach of also considering the stance of the emperor, Leo I in our case, with regard to Daniel.

## Priests in Late Antique Politics

With Hasse-Ungeheuer's focus on the emperor, we touch upon another thriving branch of historical scholarship on Late Antiquity, which examines imperial politics and representation during the reigns of specific emperors and over longer-term trends.<sup>17</sup> During the 5th century, two developments notably made their mark on emperors: emperors no longer left Constantinople as their place of residence, and Christian aspects and vir-

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bypass politics, but focus on more mundane aspects of monasticism (significantly, both discuss the general category of 'monks' rather than the more specific group of 'holy men'). The studies in Camplani/Filorama 2006 do examine holy men, but with a focus mostly on local relations of power and authority. Finally, the political history of Pfeilschifter 2013, 434–451, constitutes a notable negation of a structural political role for holy men in Constantinople: evaluating their actions in the history of Constantinople from 395 to 610, he concludes that they did not constitute a "consensus group", i.e. the emperor did not depend on their approval to stay in power.

<sup>15</sup> Kosiński 2016; Hasse-Ungeheuer 2016.

<sup>16</sup> The critical review by Trampedach 2016 rightly signals more flaws in Kosiński's work, among which his neglect of much (generally more recent) scholarly literature pertinent to the topic of his study.

<sup>17</sup> The reigns of Leo I and Basiliscus are the reigns of two out of five 5th-century emperors of the east that have not yet been (fully) covered by a recent study (the others being Arcadius, Marcian, and Leo II). However, the voluminous work of Siebigs 2010, which nominally covers only the first three years of Leo I's reign, also addresses many issues that are of importance to the entire reigns of both Marcian and Leo. Millar 2006 and Kelly 2013 revise the rule of Theodosius II, Kosiński 2010a is a recent account of Zeno, and Anastasius' reign is treated in Haarer 2006 and Meier 2009. Pfeilschifter 2013 covers the entire 5th century.

tues became a more emphatic aspect of imperial self-representation.<sup>18</sup> Both of these developments facilitated the holy man's way to the emperor. Although Daniel's political position as a holy man was exceptional, it is a (climactic) example of the Late Antique trend that Christian 'priests' (again in the broad sense of the word) could have significant influence on imperial politics. The following precis of this trend, which I propose here as a hypothesis,<sup>19</sup> offers an impression of how the political role of Christian priests developed in Late Antiquity and allows us to see how Daniel fits into this. I observe the political involvement of priests through an etic lense: actions we may perceive as 'political' would not necessarily (indeed, often not at all) have appeared as such to a Late Antique audience.

As Christianity became the dominant religion in the Roman Empire over the course of the 4th century, a hierarchy of church offices came into existence that was parallel to, but, importantly, separate from the Roman political-administrative structure.<sup>20</sup> The formation of this independent clerical hierarchy constitutes a significant break with the position of priesthoods in prior ages.<sup>21</sup> In the christianised empire, influential religious offices were no longer an integral part of the aristocratic curriculum, as they had been in the pagan Empire.<sup>22</sup> Importantly, this meant that Christian priests (at least theoretically) owed their rank and influence not to the emperor's favour, but to their status as ordained priests, making them mediators between the human and the divine – this is what Rapp means by the bishop's pragmatic authority. On this basis, they enjoyed *parrhesia*, the ability to speak without restraint to persons of secular power, including the emperor himself.<sup>23</sup>

In the 4th century, bishops used this *parrhesia* with the emperor most, particularly those who held the high-ranking sees in the largest and most important cities of the empire: Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Milan, and Rome. They had considerable influence, particularly in matters of religious politics, where they often competed with each other to gain imperial support for their doctrinal conviction. Some of the most assertive bishops even outrightly opposed imperial policy and confronted

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<sup>18</sup> Diefenbach 1996; Meier 2017, 513–524.

<sup>19</sup> This hypothesis is partly based on observations I will expound in detail in my PhD thesis, which discusses the political role of holy men in the 5th century.

<sup>20</sup> Hunt 1997.

<sup>21</sup> We focus on institutional priestly offices here, although professional 'priests' who relied on forms of religious expertise such as astrology, divination, and/or magic could certainly also be influential as personal adviser or persons of secular power.

<sup>22</sup> Beard et al. 1998, 99–108 (particularly for the early empire), 370.

<sup>23</sup> Brown 1992, 61–70; Rapp 2005, 267–271. This is not to deny that more mundane means such as wealth, networks, and education were also important to enforce a bishop's authority; see Gaddis 2009 on the integration of traditional "[h]abits, discourses, and structures of power" into the "political church".



the emperor, claiming superiority on the basis of their spiritual authority.<sup>24</sup> Although partisan clerics could celebrate such moments, both the emperor and the ecumenical community of bishops perceived this potential for episcopal influence on the imperial court as essentially problematic. Already at the council of Serdica in 343, the gathered bishops with imperial approval issued canons that greatly restricted the mobility of bishops to travel to the emperor and make their appeal.<sup>25</sup> These canons obviously did not immediately diminish episcopal authority, but towards the end of the 4th century and continuing into the fifth, the emperor of the east<sup>26</sup> indeed succeeded in establishing more control over the bishops in his half of the empire. Particularly the bishop of Constantinople came to depend on the emperor's favour for the tenure of his see: should he somehow displease the emperor, he could easily lose his position and his authority.<sup>27</sup>

This is where the holy man enters the political arena. By the middle of the 4th century, Anthony of Egypt was the first holy man to gain empire-wide renown. His fame was spread by Athanasius of Alexandria, one of the most influential 4th-century bishops who successfully challenged imperial authority on several occasions.<sup>28</sup> According to Athanasius (*Life of Anthony* 81),<sup>29</sup> Antony's stature was so great that even Emperor Constantine and his sons Constantius and Constans wrote letters to the holy man "as to a father". As was befitting to his holy modesty, Antony did not make too much out of the honour the imperials paid to him; he answered the letters only at the urging of his followers.

Holy men became more actively involved in imperial politics toward the end of the century.<sup>30</sup> Coming to Constantinople from Syria, the holy Isaac is credited to have been the first monk to establish a monastery in the capital in 378 and thus to have been the first leader of a monastic community there. Obviously, Isaac's presence immediately made itself visible in the highest political circles of the capital: he received

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24 Athanasius of Alexandria and Ambrose of Milan are the best examples of such towering bishops who made their mark on religious politics and rivalled the emperor's authority (with success).

25 Hess 2002, 201–209.

26 Due to the demise of imperial power in the west, occidental bishops became far more autonomous than their eastern colleagues, and the bishop of Rome could assert his authority much more independently than his colleague in Constantinople; see Gwynn 2012, 890–896.

27 The depositions of John Chrysostom, Nestorius, and Flavian in the first half of the 5th century rank among the most famous cases.

28 Barnes 1993.

29 Athanasius' account of Anthony's ascetic life in the Egyptian desert, which became the literary standard for subsequent Greek hagiography, served to associate himself with the holy man to enhance his own authority as a bishop, as shown by Hägg 2011.

30 My overview does not take into account the (often adduced) influence that Porphyry of Gaza allegedly exercised on Emperor Arcadius and his wife Eudoxia in the vivid portrayal by 'Marc the Deacon' (*Life of Porphyry of Gaza* 26–57). I agree with Barnes 2016, 260–284 and Hübner 2013, 58–67, who consider the text a later forgery with little historical value for the period it purports to describe; arguments in favour of authenticity were recently put forward by Lampadaridi 2016, 12–25.



support from senatorial aristocrats and was involved in the controversy around John Chrysostom as bishop of Constantinople.<sup>31</sup> The holy monks who succeeded Isaac as leaders of the monastic community in Constantinople notably took part in the dogmatic conflicts around the councils of Ephesus in 431 and 449 and of Chalcedon in 451.<sup>32</sup> Most successful was a pupil of Isaac named Dalmatius. He countered the influence of Nestorius, the bishop of Constantinople, whose teachings Dalmatius considered heretical but who enjoyed the favour of Emperor Theodosius II. He did so by ostentatiously coming forth from the monastery where he had lived an ascetic life for 48 years to confront Theodosius in person. As a consequence of Dalmatius' momentous visit, the emperor supposedly took sides against Nestorius and anathematised his Christological position. Two decades later, the archimandrite Eutyches faced an opposite fate when his own teachings were denounced at the Council of Chalcedon. Not unlike the restrictions imposed on bishops a century before at the Council of Serdica, the canons that were issued at Chalcedon restricted the mobility of monks and bound them closer to the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>33</sup> These canons seem to have effectively brought at least the capital's monks in line: we no longer hear of their participation in controversies in the years following the council. Instead, over the next decades, our Daniel from Syria would be the figurehead of (orthodox) Christian authority in the capital's politics.

Daniel is the second famous stylite saint: his predecessor and example Symeon the Stylite was the most prominent holy man of the eastern provinces of the empire from the 420s to his death in 459. While Symeon was still alive, Theodoret of Cyrrhus produced a hagiographical account of his life, which forms the climax in a collection of *Lives of Syrian holy men (Religious history 26)*.<sup>34</sup> According to Theodoret's account, masses of people from within and outside the empire were drawn to Symeon's abode in veneration of the stylite. Echoing the canonical *Life of Anthony*, Symeon also counselled the emperor, Theodosius II, via letters (*Religious history 26.27*).<sup>35</sup> A follower of Symeon, Daniel was to transfer the authority of the first stylite to the centre of imperial power, on the banks of the Bosphorus, making his position as a holy man far more political.

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<sup>31</sup> See Caner 2002, 191–199 on Isaac's connections and conflicts in Constantinople.

<sup>32</sup> See Bacht 1953, 193–221; Caner 2002, 218–235; Dagron 1970; Elm 2015, 321–325 and Frend 1972, 3–17 on the involvement of Constantinopolitan monks in the dogmatic controversies of the early 5th century.

<sup>33</sup> Canons 4, 8, 18, and 23; translations of the canons are available in Price/Gaddis 2005. The relevance of these canons for monasticism in the capital is discussed in Caner 2002, 237–238; Trampedach 2013, 187–189 and Ueding 1953.

<sup>34</sup> Consulted in the translation of Price 1985, 160–176.

<sup>35</sup> Price 1985, 175 n. 35 specifically lists Symeon's contacts with persons of authority.

## Spiritual Authority Politicised

We now turn to a close examination of the political dynamics around Daniel, based on the hagiographical account of his life. It should not go unnoticed that hagiographical texts pose particular problems for historical investigation. The lives of holy men are full of supernatural events and miracles, and *topoi* abound in the genre, which makes it difficult to discern whether a passage has some historical bearing or is merely included as a repetition of earlier hagiographical accounts (or both). Scholars generally consider the *LD* one of the more reliable hagiographical texts of Late Antiquity, arguing that it contains many historical details (events, relative chronology, names of officials) that match with information we find in other sources.<sup>36</sup> Although historicity is certainly an important issue, an examination restricted to the account of the *LD* without recourse to information other sources provide suffices for the purposes of this paper. From the information the *LD* provides on Daniel's contacts with persons of secular power, I extrapolate a model that describes more generally how a holy man and his spiritual authority functioned in a political environment. This model does not necessarily depend on the presence of specific persons at specific times: similar processes could (and, indeed, did)<sup>37</sup> occur around other holy men at other instances.

We focus on two phases of Daniel's political activity as narrated in the *LD*. First, we examine his rise to prominence after he has taken up his ascetic life as a stylite near Constantinople; this stage is characterised by contacts with aristocrats (*LD* 22–35). The second phase revolves around Daniel's contacts with the emperor Leo, who, during this period, seems to have exclusive access to the stylite as his personal guide (*LD* 38–66). Particularly instructive is Daniel's role in the conflict between Leo and his influential general Aspar.<sup>38</sup>

The first stage begins with some interactions between the holy man and two (relatively) low-ranking aristocrats that we only know from the *LD*. Daniel receives his first pillar from a certain Marc, whose identification as a *silentarius* reveals that he belonged to the capital's aristocracy.<sup>39</sup> He might have heard of Daniel through a monk named Sergius, who brought the message of Symeon's death to Constantinople and gave Daniel Symeon's tunic – one of the significant moments where the authority of

<sup>36</sup> Lane Fox 1997, *passim*; Kosiński 2016, 119–122; Trampedach 2013, 190; Vivian 2010.

<sup>37</sup> As I will show in my forthcoming PhD thesis.

<sup>38</sup> Studies on Daniel's role in imperial politics include Croke 2005, 174–175; Kosiński 2016, 129–207; Lane Fox 1997; Trampedach 2013. In this paper we bypass the arguable climax of Daniel's political activity: his opposition against Basiliscus. Its dynamics could certainly be described through the proposed model, but an examination of the episode is not essential to the argument put forward here.

<sup>39</sup> The *silentarii* were responsible for keeping order during imperial audiences; their proximity to the emperor made them influential members of the imperial court, particularly in the 5th and 6th centuries; see Jones 1964, 571–572.

Symeon is transferred to Daniel (*LD* 22–26). The first response to the erection of Daniel's column is negative: a man named Gelanius, as a *castrensis sacrae mensae* also a member of the lower imperial aristocracy,<sup>40</sup> appears as the owner of the land where Daniel's column stands: unhappy about Daniel's intrusion, he summons the holy man to depart. In fact, canon law would have been on Gelanius' side had he pressed the issue;<sup>41</sup> in the hagiographical narrative, Gelanius naturally changes his mind about Daniel, warned by a devastating storm and Daniel's popularity. He accepts and recognises Daniel's holiness by offering him a second pillar, which Daniel reluctantly accepts (*LD* 27–28).

Daniel then receives two high-ranking figures about whom we are better informed. First comes Cyrus of Panopolis: he originally arrived in Constantinople as a learned poet from Egypt, but he became a prominent politician during the 430s, when he served as consul and pretorian prefect. He had fallen from grace around 440 and was consequently relegated away from the capital to become a bishop.<sup>42</sup> On his first visit to Daniel, he expresses his anger about the fact that the unworthy Gelanius was allowed the honour of erecting a second column for the holy man; he would have gladly sponsored the column himself. Daniel reassures Cyrus that all is well as it is and tells him that God would compensate him for his expression of faith (*LD* 32). Somewhat later, Cyrus returns to Daniel to thank him for freeing his daughter from demonic possession. As a thanksgiving, he offers a verse inscription to be carved into Daniel's column, which the hagiographical text quotes (*LD* 36).

Meanwhile, Daniel has received another distinguished visitor in the person of the empress (Augusta) Licinia Eudoxia (*LD* 35). A daughter of Theodosius II, she had been married to the Western Roman Emperors Valentinian III and Petronius Maximus (briefly), both of whom were killed in 455. When the Vandals sacked Rome and killed Maximus that year, they took Eudoxia and her two daughters as captives to Africa, from which she has recently returned when she visits Daniel.<sup>43</sup> She has heard about the holy man through her son-in-law Olybrius, who was to become Emperor in the west and who had earlier met with Daniel, as the text tells only at this point.<sup>44</sup> Like Cyrus on his first visit, Eudoxia also brings up matters of sponsorship, as she asks Daniel to relocate his column to one of her estates. Daniel refuses her request but prays that she may be granted an earthly and a heavenly kingdom.

Cyrus and Eudoxia are the most distinguished of Daniel's visitors in the *LD* before Emperor Leo comes to him. It is striking that, while both once ranked as members of

<sup>40</sup> See Kosiński 2016, 173 n. 241 on this rank.

<sup>41</sup> See n. 33 above on the canons of the Council of Chalcedon, which did not allow free movement and settling of monks without episcopal approval (which Daniel did not have, as far as we know).

<sup>42</sup> Martindale 1980, 336–339.

<sup>43</sup> Martindale 1980, 410–412.

<sup>44</sup> Kosiński 2016, 171 gives some sensible suggestions to explain why this meeting between Olybrius and Daniel is only referred to in passing rather than included in the narrative.

the highest imperial elite, they are no longer at the height of their political power when they visit the stylite. Both, moreover, offer Daniel their sponsorship. A close association with the holy man would obviously have been in their interest. Perhaps they looked for a pious resort to religion in times of hardship; perhaps, too, they sought the holy man's support to achieve political rehabilitation.

After these visits, the contact between Leo and Daniel sets off, which is the subject of most of the hagiography's subsequent narrative for as long as Leo lives. We have earlier been informed that it was Gelanios who brought the stylite to the emperor's attention (*LD* 34). The first contact between the emperor and Daniel occurs when Leo orders a certain Sergius to ask the holy man to pray for the birth of a son. This he does and, of course, Empress Verina soon gives birth to a son. In gratitude, Leo organises the erection of a third column for the holy man (*LD* 38). The events of the ensuing narrative confirm Daniel's importance as Leo's guardian and counsellor. After Gennadios, the bishop of Constantinople, has ordained Daniel a priest on Leo's orders (*LD* 42–43),<sup>45</sup> the emperor starts visiting the holy man in person. The emperor organises several building projects around the column: a palace where Leo could stay in close proximity to Daniel (*LD* 50), a shelter on top of the column (*LD* 54), and a shrine and a monastery at its base (*LD* 57). Slowly but surely, Daniel's contacts with Leo become more political: they initially concern figures from Leo's personal circle whom Leo wants to punish but is kept from doing so through Daniel's intercession (*LD* 48–49). Before long, however, Daniel is involved in the highest matters of state: Leo brings a foreign ruler, the king of Lazica, to Daniel so that he may arbitrate negotiations with him (*LD* 51); the emperor asks for the holy man's opinion on military strategy in Africa (*LD* 56); he bids him to pray on behalf of his general and newlywed son-in-law Zeno (*LD* 65). The last case touches upon a situation that is worth considering in detail, as it illustrates how Daniel's spiritual authority legitimates a crucial and controversial turn in Leo's reign.

Zeno was one of the leading figures that competed for influence at Leo's court during the 460s. His main rival was the general Aspar, who had an impressive record of military service in the Roman army and who had personally selected Leo, an officer from his ranks, as Marcian's successor in 457. This conflict between Leo and Aspar has recently drawn the attention of historians of Late Antiquity, who debunk the traditional assumption that ethnicity drove this conflict between Aspar as leader of a 'Germanic' and Zeno as leader of an 'Isaurian' party.<sup>46</sup> Instead, the conflict should be seen as a more pragmatic struggle for power, in which both parties might have occasionally used ethnic stereotypes to attack their opponents.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, religion

<sup>45</sup> See n. 5 above on Daniel's ordainment.

<sup>46</sup> Isauria, a mountainous region in southern Anatolia, was famous for its warlike inhabitants, who often plagued the surrounding countryside. Consequently, soldiers from Isauria often served in the Roman army: Croke 2005, 200.

<sup>47</sup> Thus Croke 2005; McEvoy 2016; Stewart 2014.

also played an important role: Aspar and large parts of the army favoured Arian/Homoean Christianity, while Leo, Zeno, and the majority of the capital's populace were 'orthodox', i.e. Nicene/Chalcedonian Christians.<sup>48</sup> The *LD* is an important source for this conflict, as it introduces Zeno when he presents letters to the emperor that reveal a collision of Aspar's son Ardabarius with Sassanid Persia, the archenemy of the Eastern Roman Empire in Late Antiquity (*LD* 55). Leo thereafter appoints Zeno a consul and marries him off to his daughter Ariadne, although she had already been promised to Aspar's son Patricius (*LD* 65).

Daniel's role in this conflict is most interesting. On no point does the hagiography explicitly attack Aspar and his family, but from Daniel's sympathy for Leo and Zeno we may deduce that Daniel can hardly have had a favourable view of them. Daniel gives his support to Zeno's cause by prophesying that Zeno would survive the plot that is being formed against him (*LD* 65). Daniel does not mention who is behind this plot, but it can be inferred that Aspar and his followers are meant. In the next chapter, they are said to stir up a rebellion against the emperor himself after the birth of his grandson Leo (III), a son to Zeno and Ariadne. The emperor overcomes the rebellion with God's help and destroys Aspar and his sons (*LD* 66). The hagiographical account presents this execution of Aspar as a salutary solution of the conflict, but we know from other sources that it was a rather controversial move: Aspar's death was followed by some rioting of his supporters and Leo was given the nickname of '*makelles*', 'butcher', for his brutal conduct.<sup>49</sup> The disputed nature of this event shows that Leo could well have used Daniel's spiritual authority in legitimating his coup.<sup>50</sup>

As we are starting to consider issues of legitimacy, it is a good moment to conclude by presenting the model that I extract from the described interactions. Most of Daniel's contact with persons of authority in the *LD* are one-on-one engagements, rather independent from other contacts he happens to have. In most of them, moreover, he appears as the passive party that is approached by someone who, in reverence of Daniel's holiness, asks for his help through intercessory prayer or wishes to express his or her admiration by offering (material) support. A generalising model for these interactions based on a literal reading of the *LD* would include just two agents, with the interest coming from one direction, as reflected in Fig. 1.

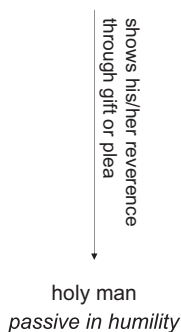
Although we cannot fail to stress the importance personal religiosity must have played behind such one-on-one interactions, I propose a more complex, triangular model to describe the workings of a holy man's spiritual authority in a political context (Fig. 2). This model, which has the holy man at one end, the emperor at another,

<sup>48</sup> See McEvoy 2016, 498–502 on (the consequences of) the Arian identity of Aspar's family.

<sup>49</sup> John Malalas, *Chronicon* 14.40 on the riots; Malchus fr. 1 on Leo's nickname.

<sup>50</sup> In fact, Aspar himself also appealed to spiritual authority, as he was engaged in (traditional aristocratic) patronage to many religious foundations in Constantinople: McEvoy 2016, 496–498. We might see similar motivations behind Zeno's association with the monk Peter the Fuller, on whose life see Kosiński 2010b.

person of authority (including the emperor)



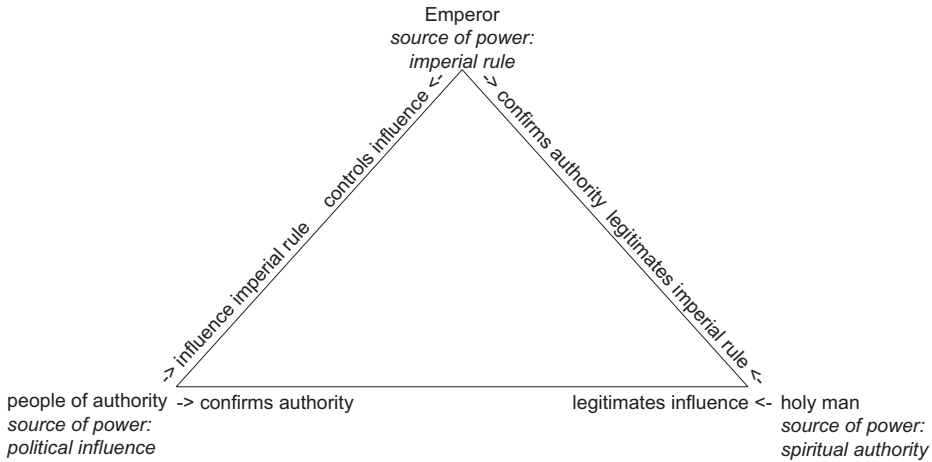
**Fig. 1:** The interaction model of passive spiritual authority. Created by Maurits de Leeuw.

and other persons of power at the third, takes into account sources of power of the parties involved<sup>51</sup> and emphasises the mutual benefit for the holy man and other parties in establishing constructive contact. Legitimacy is the ‘currency’, so to say, that flows through the triangle, in which the holy man’s spiritual authority also partakes. As we have seen in his rise to prominence, Daniel’s spiritual authority grows through his contacts with ever more important officials. They, on the other hand, benefit from being associated with the holy man, wherefore they seek to act as his patron or sponsor. The holy man may boost their authority by blessing them or giving a favourable prediction, as Daniel does with Eudoxia and Zeno. In turn, as they are seen to enjoy divine favour communicated through them by the holy man, they could act with greater influence with the emperor. The processes function similarly with the emperor: Leo enhances Daniel’s spiritual authority by humbly paying him respect, while the close association of the emperor with the holy man affects the legitimacy of imperial rule, which the holy man may again boost through prayers or favourable prophecies (see Fig. 2). When the mediation of the holy man brings divine favour to the emperor’s rule, he increases his legitimacy to enact plans and policies, even when they are as controversial as Leo’s ‘slaughtering’ of Aspar.

## Conclusion

Daniel’s three decades of ascetic life on top of his column at the coast of the Bosphorus must remain essentially strange to most of us modern observers (which, to be sure, seems a perfectly healthy reaction). Yet, I hope to have offered a better understanding

<sup>51</sup> Of course, these are not the only sources of power the different parties had at their disposal; they are, however, the sources that interact most with each other in this specific setting. A holy man’s asceticism, for example, would probably not be affected by political processes.



**Fig. 2:** Interaction model of spiritual authority and legitimacy. Created by Maurits de Leeuw.

of how his lofty life close to the centre of imperial power could take the political turn it took. Daniel's political influence as a holy man is part of a late antique trend in which priests/religious experts regularly played a role in (church) politics at the imperial level. Bishops seem to have taken on this political role most successfully in the 4th century, but their ability to exercise such influence was increasingly restricted and their authority was subjected to that of the (eastern) emperor. The holy man took over from the bishop towards the turn of the century and continued to be a potentially powerful political player during the first half of the 5th century, as long as the monastic communities in Constantinople enjoyed a large degree of independence. After Symeon the Stylite had introduced a new form of holiness in the Syrian countryside, Daniel trod in his footsteps and brought the towering spiritual authority of a stylite to the centre of imperial power.

In the proximity of the empire's aristocracy and the emperor himself, Daniel's spiritual authority grew through his contacts with people from the highest circles of the imperial elite, who were eager to act as the stylite's sponsor. Once emperor Leo I had reverently found his way to him and further confirmed his holy status through his patronage, Daniel became an important pillar on which the Emperor built the legitimacy of his rule. The stylite's spiritual authority was particularly welcome in his struggle to emancipate from his powerful general Aspar. My evaluation of Daniel's political role in Constantinople again confirms how intertwined secular and religious power were in Late Antiquity, even to a holy man with mortified feet, who stood raised on a high platform that should have extracted him from worldly concerns.



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